

The background is a dark blue gradient with a starry field of small white dots. There are several circular graphic elements: a large circular scale with numbers from 0 to 240 in the top right, and smaller circular patterns with arrows in the top left, bottom left, and bottom right.

I HAVE NO WORDS: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION FOR BUSINESS

- By Shawna Romkey

93%

Mehrabian's Rule

"7-38-55 Rule"

7% Spoken Words: The actual literal meaning of what is said.

38% Voice/Tone: Pitch, volume, speed, and inflection.

55% Body Language: Facial expressions, gestures, and posture.

Emotional Weight: Nonverbal cues handle the "how" (how the person feels).

Verbal Weight: Spoken words handle the "what" (the facts and data).

7 SECONDS

100 milliseconds (one-tenth of a second)

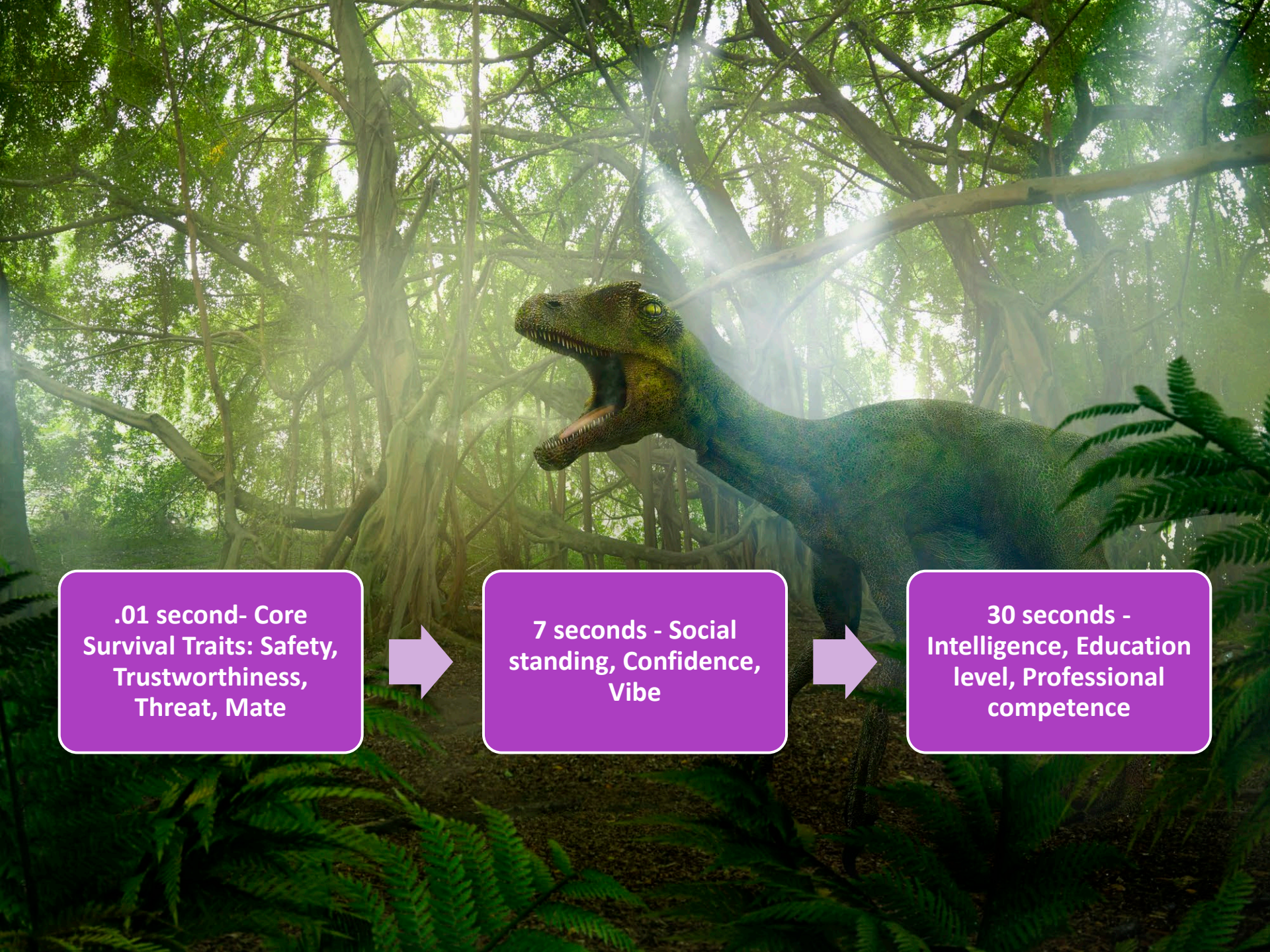
Trustworthiness (The most immediate and strongest judgment)

Competence

Likability

Aggressiveness

Attractiveness



**.01 second- Core
Survival Traits: Safety,
Trustworthiness,
Threat, Mate**

**7 seconds - Social
standing, Confidence,
Vibe**

**30 seconds -
Intelligence, Education
level, Professional
competence**

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION



Rapport



Presentations

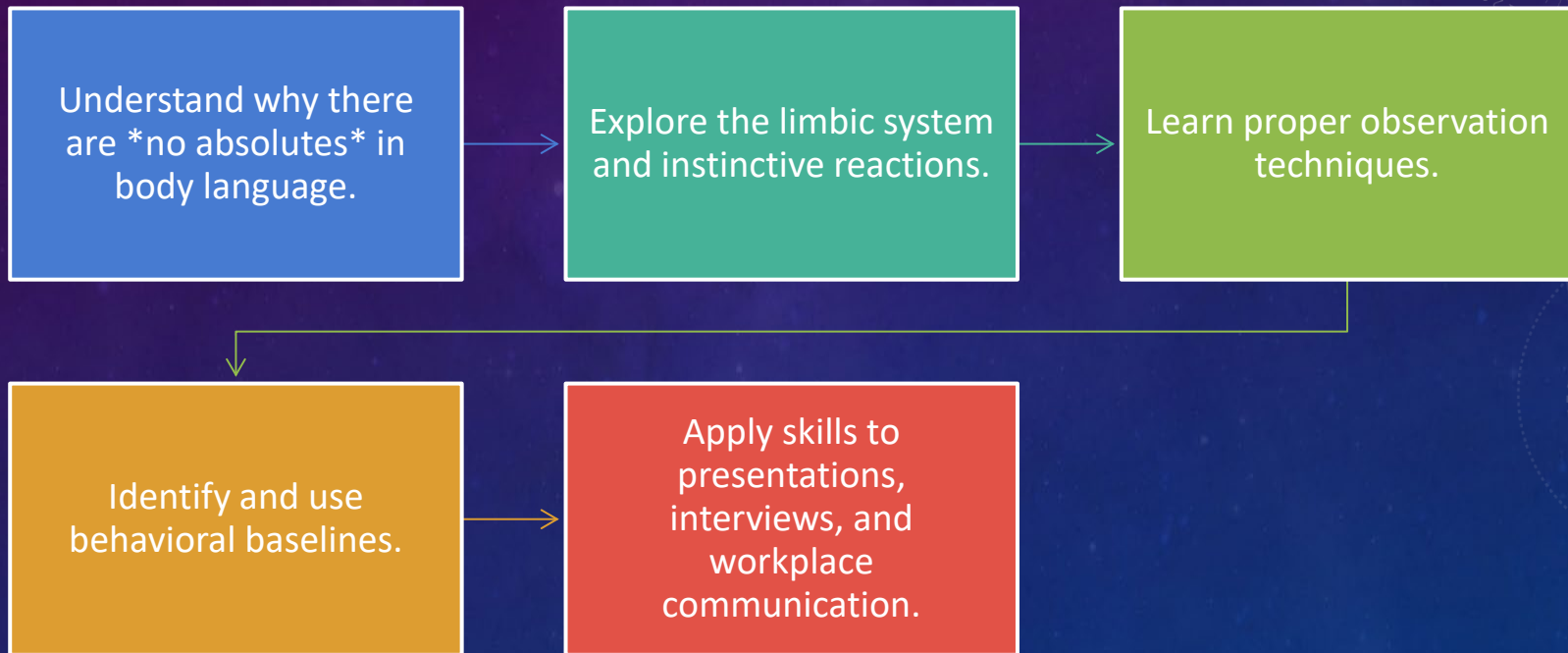


Interviews



Business
meetings

LEARNING OBJECTIVES





CORE PRINCIPLE: THERE ARE NO ABSOLUTES

A single cue never tells the whole story.

Context, clusters, and baselines matter.

Behaviors such as arm-crossing or nose-touching are not universal indicators.

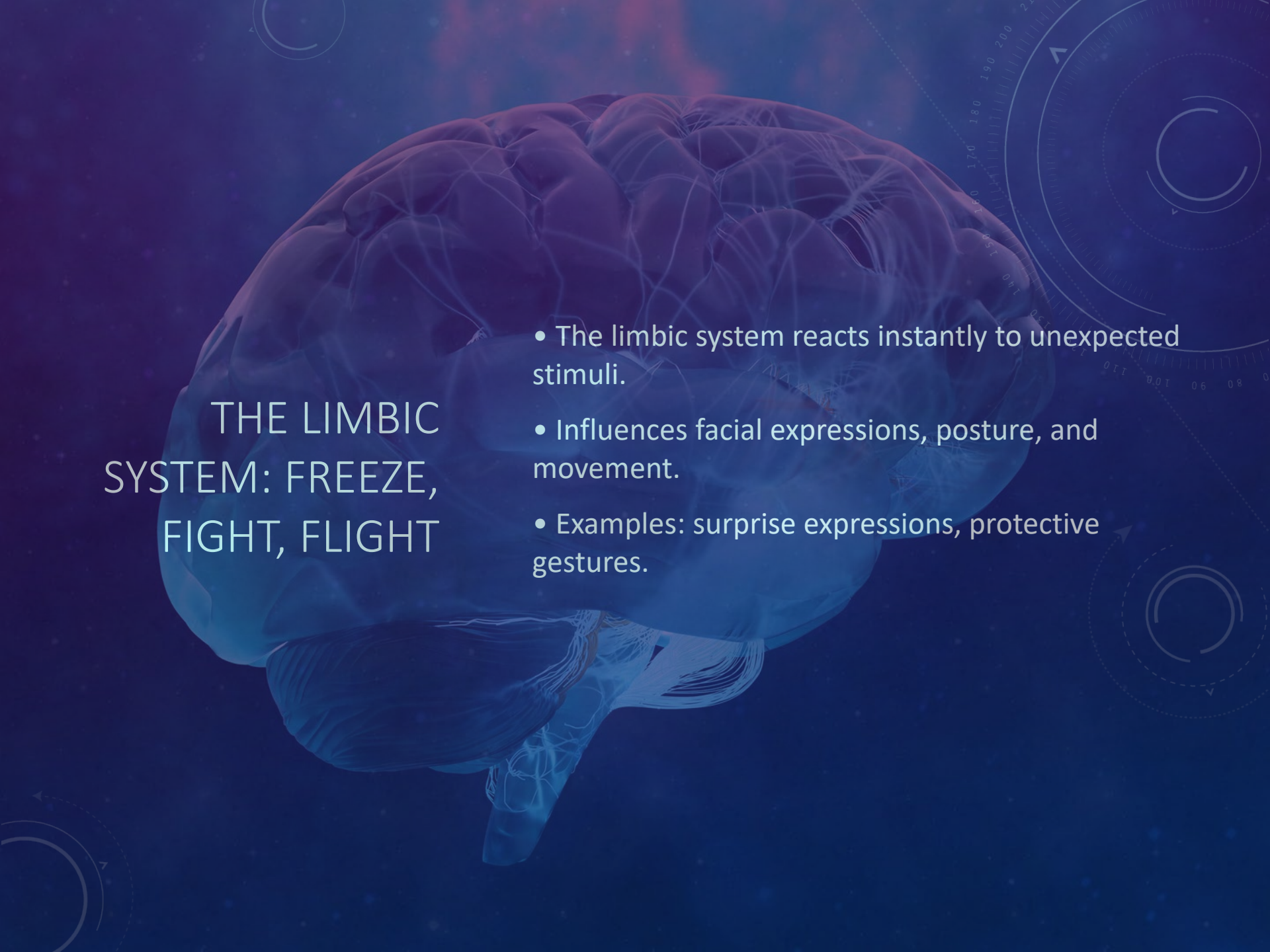
WHY 'NO ABSOLUTES' MATTERS IN COMMUNICATION

Prevents misinterpretation during presentations or interviews.

Encourages evidence-based analysis instead of assumptions.

Promotes inclusive communication and avoids bias.





THE LIMBIC SYSTEM: FREEZE, FIGHT, FLIGHT

- The limbic system reacts instantly to unexpected stimuli.
- Influences facial expressions, posture, and movement.
- Examples: surprise expressions, protective gestures.

LIMBIC ACTIVATION IN COMMUNICATION

Helps identify discomfort, confusion, or stress in students or colleagues.

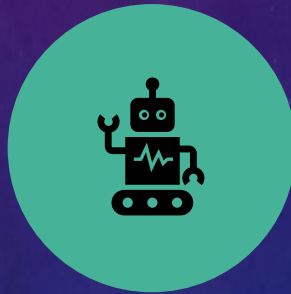
Can reveal emotional reactions before verbal responses.

Useful during conflict resolution or tough conversations.

SPOTTING SUBTLE REACTIONS



SMALL CUES: EYEBROW
LIFT, WIDENING EYES,
MICRO-PAUSES.



THESE OFTEN INDICATE
SURPRISE OR COGNITIVE
LOAD.



USE PAIRED WITH
CONTEXT FOR
ACCURACY.



OBSERVING PROPERLY

Shift

Shift from simply *seeing* to *actively observing*.

Look

Look for sudden changes in behavior.

Track

Track macro (whole body) to micro (small facial movements).

AWARENESS OF YOURSELF

When observing others, remain aware of how **you** appear.

Maintain open posture and neutral facial expression.

Reduces intimidation and increases accuracy.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS



What changed?



When did it change?



What was said or done immediately before the change?

FACIAL DECODING BASICS

Brain regions help
decode
expressions (e.g.,
fusiform gyrus).

Expressions reflect
emotional states
but require
baselines.

DEVELOPING A BASELINE

Baseline = person's
typical behavior in a
neutral state.

Without a baseline,
interpretations are
inaccurate.



BASELINE EXAMPLES



Someone who always fidgets → stillness is meaningful.



Someone who rarely moves → sudden movement is meaningful.

LOOKING FOR DEVIATIONS

Look for a change
from the baseline.

Ask questions
when behavior
shifts after a key
moment.

Deviation =
potential stress,
discomfort, or
cognitive strain.

APPLYING SKILLS TO PRESENTATIONS

1

Identify audience engagement or confusion.

2

Adjust pacing based on visible cues.

3

Build rapport through open, congruent body language.

APPLYING SKILLS TO INTERVIEWS

Read

Read discomfort or enthusiasm.



Use

Use observations to ask clarifying questions.



Maintain

Maintain professionalism; avoid assumptions.

COMFORT VS
DISCOMFORT

You are looking for
CHANGES.

Comfort = relaxed, open.

Discomfort = tension,
compression, self-soothing.



GESTURE CATEGORIES FOR COMFORT/DISCOMFORT

Comfort and discomfort
show up in:

- Emblems
- Regulators
- Affect Displays
- Barriers
- Illustrators
- Adaptors

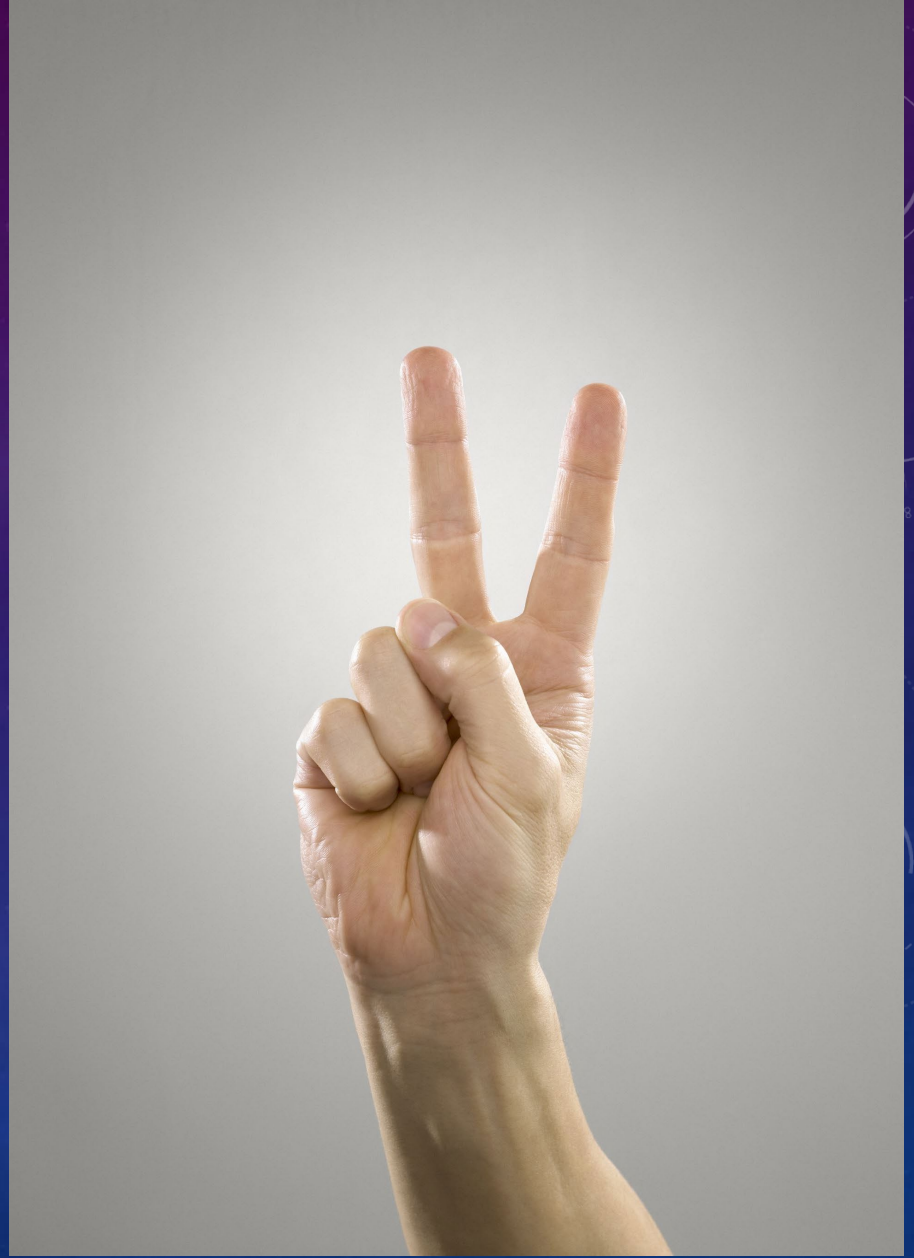
EMBLEMS – CULTURE-SPECIFIC SIGNALS



Emblems have clear meanings within specific cultures.



Examples: thumbs up, shh gesture, point, OK sign (varies by region).





REGULATORS

- Regulators: gestures that manage turn-taking or control the conversation (e.g., stop hand, pointing, timing gestures).

AFFECT DISPLAYS



Affect displays = genuine emotional expressions using face + body.



Often spontaneous and difficult to fake.



BARRIERS — PHYSICAL OR BEHAVIORAL



- Crossing arms
- Holding an object between you and someone
- Turning away
- Indicate discomfort or self-protection.



ILLUSTRATORS – EMPHASIZING SPEECH



ILLUSTRATORS RISE WITH
EMOTIONAL INTENSITY.



MIS-TIMED ILLUSTRATORS MAY
INDICATE UNCERTAINTY OR
INTERNAL CONFLICT.

OJ Simpson example



ADAPTORS (MANIPULATORS)— NERVOUS ENERGY RELEASE

Adaptors =
unconscious self-
soothing gestures.

Examples: touching
face, rubbing neck,
chewing lips, heavy
sighs, throat clearing.



USING THESE CUES IN INTERVIEWS



Discomfort cues → ask clarifying questions.



Observe adaptors during tough questions.



Regulators show when a candidate wishes to speak.



Emblems reveal strong reactions.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS



Spot disengagement
quickly.



Assess student
uncertainty.



Adjust pacing based
on affect displays.



Use open posture to
model comfort.

ETHICAL BODY LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

Rely on

Never rely on one cue.

Use

Use clusters + context + baseline.

Avoid

Avoid stereotypes.

Support

Support communication rather than judge.



The Face



THE FACE

10,000+ expressions from 47 facial muscles

Key areas: Forehead, Eyebrows, Eyes, Mouth

7 Universal Expressions:
Happiness, Sadness, Anger, Fear,
Surprise, Disgust, Contempt

Still the fairest of them all!

WALT DISNEY'S

*Snow White
and the Seven Dwarfs*



7 UNIVERSAL EXPRESSIONS

Happiness

Sadness

Anger

Fear

Surprise

Disgust

Contempt

Image: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* movie poster (Disney, 1937). Used under fair use for educational purposes.



THE BROW

Brow = emotional billboard

Signals: approval-seeking, skepticism, brow-beating

Eyebrow Flash as greeting/recognition cue



THE EYES

Myth: Eye direction
does NOT reliably
indicate lying

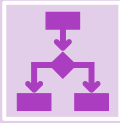
Squint signals
threat, discomfort,
confusion

Blink rate: indicates
stress, eyes have
dried due to limbic
system commands

[Susan Smith example](#)



MOUTH



Lip Pursing: indicates **disagreement, disapproval, or physical restraint** (holding back a comment).



Lip Compression: suggests **high stress, anxiety, or hidden information**. It's a classic "blocking" behavior.



The Lip Bite: signals **nervousness, uncertainty, or vulnerability**.



The Asymmetrical Smile (The Smirk): universal sign of **contempt or superiority**.



Down-Turned Corners: sadness, disappointment, or hidden dissatisfaction.

MOUTH

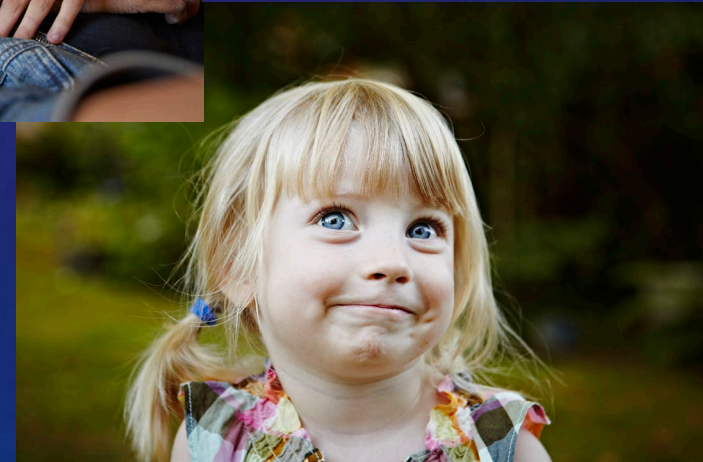
Hand-over-Mouth: indicates **disbelief, shock, or an attempt to suppress a reaction.**

Tongue Show: Briefly sticking the tongue out (often between the teeth) can signal that someone has "**gotten away with something**" or is performing a task they find difficult.

Lip Licking: a frequent pacifying behavior. Stress dries out the mouth, so licking the lips is an unconscious attempt to **soothe anxiety.**

Jaw Clenching: indicates **hostility, suppressed anger, or intense determination.**

Slack Jaw: usually signals **surprise, awe, or total mental exhaustion.**



Leo DiCaprio example

An elderly man with a white beard is sitting on a light-colored mat on a tiled floor, stretching his legs. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and shorts. He is looking down at his hands, which are resting on his right leg. The room has a window with white curtains on the left. The image is overlaid with a blue tint and several white circular and dashed line graphics, including a large circular scale on the right side with numbers from 80 to 200. The text "The Torso and Extremities" is centered in the image.

The Torso and Extremities

WHY BODY LANGUAGE MATTERS

Nonverbal cues shape credibility

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graph TD; A[Nonverbal cues shape credibility] --> B[Students + professionals judged in seconds]; B --> C[Helps in presentations, interviews, meetings];
```

Students + professionals judged in seconds

Helps in presentations, interviews, meetings

HANDS: COMMUNICATION SIGNALS

- Steepling = confidence

- Open hands = honesty cues

- Hands in pockets = reduced confidence

HANDS: STRESS INDICATORS

Rubbing,
wringing,
fidgeting

Finger spacing
changes

Facial distortion
+ hands =
discomfort

HANDS AS ADAPTORS

- Used for self-soothing

- Rubbing hands together

- Picking at nails or skin





ARMS: STATUS DISPLAYS

Hands-on-hips = authority



Broad stance = dominance



Collapsed posture = low confidence



ARMS: PROTECTIVE GESTURES

- Crossed arms (not always negative)
- Used for warmth, comfort, or status

ARMS: BARRIERS

- Objects held in front of body

- Folders, backpacks, tablets

- Signals discomfort or shielding

ARMS: ILLUSTRATORS / ADAPTORS

Movements
that highlight
speech

High
illustrators =
engagement

Low
illustrators =
withdrawal

North Pridgen example

SHOULDERS: CONFIDENCE SIGNALS

Level
shoulders =
control

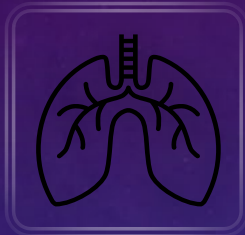
Drooped
shoulders =
stress/fatigue



SHOULDERS: THE SHRUG

- Full shrug = honest 'I don't know'
- One-sided shrug = lack of commitment or confidence

TORSO & BREATHING CUES



Rapid Breathing + Stress

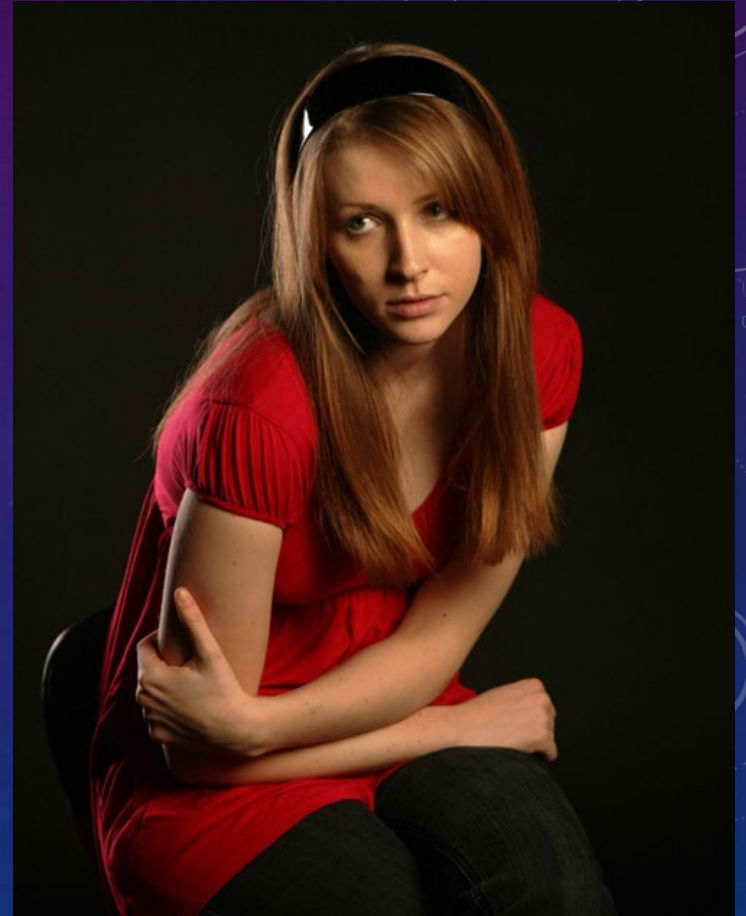
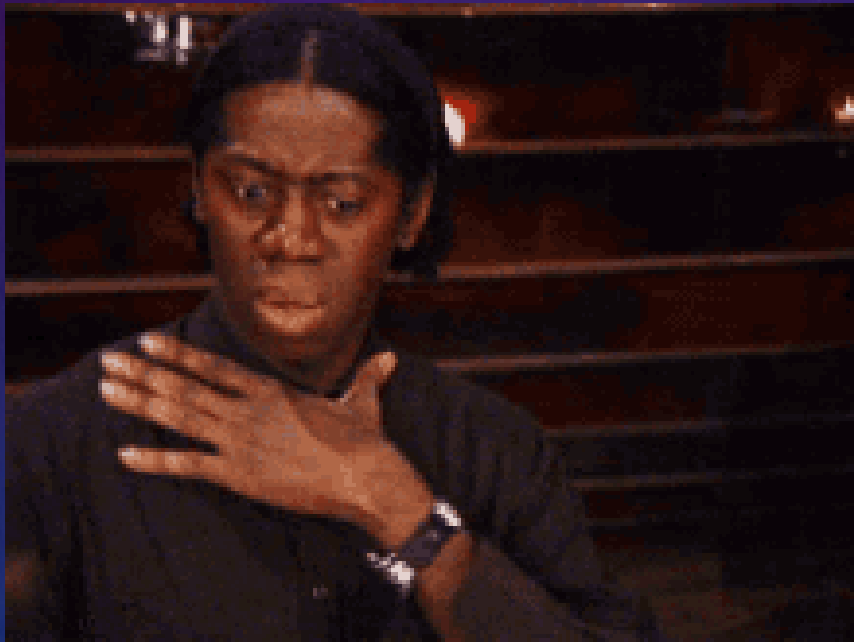


Torso angles toward/away to show
interest/discomfort



Torso / Reproductive Organ Protection

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

01

Look for
clusters

02

Consider
context

03

Compare to
the person's
baseline



APPLYING TO PRESENTATIONS

- Use open hands
- Neutral arms
- Avoid pocketing & crossed arms
- Maintain shoulder alignment



APPLYING TO INTERVIEWS



- Confident posture
- Avoid adaptors
- Use illustrators naturally

ACTIVITY: WHAT DO YOU SEE?


- What are the hands doing?
- What are the arms doing?
- What are the shoulders doing?
- What cluster is present?



ACTIVITY: IMPROVE THIS STANCE

- Identify cues
- Adjust to a more confident posture





Transmitting, Receiving
& Evaluating
Engagement

COMMUNICATION IS TWO-WAY



You transmit
signals
constantly



You also
interpret
signals from
others



Awareness
increases
clarity and
rapport

WHAT YOU TRANSMIT

Posture and
orientation

Facial expressions
& micro-
expressions

Gestures and
hand movement

Eye behaviour

WHAT YOU RECEIVE



INTEREST VS
CONFUSION CUES



EMOTIONAL
RESPONSES



AGREEMENT OR
SKEPTICISM



ENGAGEMENT
LEVEL



LISTENING AS A VISIBLE BEHAVIOUR

- Eye focus, head tilt, forward lean
- Signals attention and respect
- Students and professionals are judged on this

SIGNS OF INTEREST

Forward lean, chin down / eyes up



Nodding subtly



Facial reactivity



Consistent eye contact

SIGNS OF DISINTEREST

Leaning back, arms crossed



Blank expression



Checking phones



Lack of movement

WHEN
MIRRORING
HELPS



Interviews



Presentations



Coaching or
persuasion
contexts

READ THE ROOM!

Reading a group

Scan

- Scan room regularly

Identify

- Identify clusters of engagement

Adjust

- Adjust tone, pacing, or examples



APPLYING IN COLLEGE

- Better group communication
- Improved presentations
- Stronger instructor-student rapport



APPLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

Assessing

- Assessing client interest

Adapting

- Adapting communication in real time

Improving

- Improving negotiation outcomes

ACTIVITY

2 Truths and a Lie

Partner exercise
reading cues

Audience scanning
practice

Reflect on personal
listening habits

IF YOU REMEMBER NOTHING ELSE...

Look for
**patterns, not
single cues**

Compare to
baseline

Notice
**comfort vs.
discomfort**

Watch the
**hands, face,
and torso**

Manage what
you transmit

Use your
powers for
good

AI Assistance Disclosure

Portions of this presentation were created with the support of AI tools (ChatGPT) and revised by the instructor, Shawna Romkey.

Based on Body Language Tactics course by Scott Rouse and Greg Hartley.

Adapted for Business Communications.